



Fonseca

EARTH,

WIND,

HARRY FONSECA

AND

FIRE

Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian

Copyright © 1996 by the
Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian
Published by the Wheelwright Museum
of the American Indian
704 Camino Lejo,
Santa Fe, NM 87505

Earth, Wind, and Fire: Harry Fonseca was
published in conjunction with an exhibition of
the same title, November 9, 1996–April 23, 1997

Photographs of paintings and family members
courtesy of Harry Fonseca

Photograph of Fred Adams and Stella Eel, page 8,
by U. Hayashi, Sacramento, date unknown

Photographers and dates of all other family
photographs unknown

Portrait of Harry Fonseca, page 39,
©Toba Tucker, 1996

All other photographs by Lynn Lown

Editor: Jonathan Batkin

Designer: David Skolkin

Printer: Columbine Printing, Taos, New Mexico

Front cover: one cross from the series,
The Discovery of Gold and Souls in California,
1991–2

Inside covers: Fonseca's installation at the
Wheelwright Museum, November 1996

EARTH, LIGHT, ROCK, CROSSES,
AND THE GLORY OF GOLD

ELIZABETH WOODY
(CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE RESERVATION AT WARM SPRINGS, OREGON)
3, 7-12

COLOR PLATES

13

ANOTHER TEN YEARS WITH HARRY

MARGARET ARCHULETA
(PUEBLO/HISPANIC)
25

JOURNEYS TO
TRANSCENDENCE

FLOYD SOLOMON
(LAGUNA/ZUNI)
31

LIST OF COLOR PLATES

37

CHRONOLOGY

38

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

40

ELIZABETH WOODY

WHILE I LIVED IN SANTA FE, a realization surfaced of this landscape, which it is not much different from the high mountain desert of central Oregon. I was raised in a brilliant light, tense shadows of juniper, high mountain pine and fir. Nearby, a necessary river or spring, quintessence in peaceful temperament, moved and spoke. The geography, a biosphere of volcanic upheavals evidenced by the red soils layered with light yellows, white tuff, and rich browns, is vast. The mountains in Santa Fe lead to the Rocky Mountains. In a certain way they eventually run a rough chain parallel with the Sierra Nevada, the Cascade Mountains, and the temperate coastal rain forests of northern California, Oregon, Washington, and beyond. In many ways, they are connected to Fonseca's Maidu land base: the land's fingers of river flow westward from the mountains to the Pacific. And it is the mountains that frame the desert range and create it.

EARTH,
LIGHT,
ROCK,
CROSSES,
AND THE GLORY
OF GOLD

Why does this play into the art of Fonseca? It is the violent upheavals of the volcanic past and ravages of the colonial past. It is the same volcanic center rising in the Hawaiian archipelago. We, as native artists, cannot escape the upheavals of our past. The fire of change brings us the dark rubble and glassy obsidians and the ability to grow plant life. The witness of change has a keen eye and urgency to tell the story honestly; to tell the children how they came to be, why they are here now. The children, in turn, will tell the story to those who listen and they will carry it with them, too. Often the brutal aspects become lost in the denial of Indigenous People's long suffering the chase in



order to live. The discovery of gold wiped out massive numbers of people in California. If change was the result of pursuit of gold and glory, our humanity must claim its value in truth. If we are to endure and prosper again, create, make, care for, nurture a future, it will be with venerable essential knowledge.

Petroglyphs play a major role in our aesthetic, history, and keeping of intellect. They are a means of telling a story, writing or describing an event, or are marks from some supernatural being with a specific intent. While a passionate intent lies within the furious mark of Fonseca, there is also attachment to spontaneity, a major force in Fonseca, the man. I fondly recall walking along the San Juan River with him. He respectfully sketched the petroglyphs life-size on site. Later, he made them larger than life in his studio. The images frenetically spin out of themselves like stars and constellations. At first we stood a respectful distance from the petroglyphs and admired the authenticity of mark. The original hand carefully made a place for a descendant to observe and respond: not a material item to cart about with the maker, but a place which the maker knew we would eventually return to. The river and the cottonwoods are sentinels

and companion to the artworks, and a comfort to two artists in search of a history without alteration.

Natural pigment is more than reference to the beginning of man's elemental imprint and hand on rock. Many incredible pieces of rock art made by the divine beings happened during significant events. I know of stories attached to a place: "This is where Coyote changed her into a rock." "This is where a being emerged." "This is the way the spirit looked and it still warns us of danger." Often discounted, aboriginal myth is a valid source of accurate history. Rock art signifies in its symbols the body's enduring strength and tenacity. On its surface, rock-art pigment bonded with stone is a pure umbilical tie to the earth. It will always seem an enigma. Fonseca reaches into the ground and brings us to these places with the elemental riches of the earth. We and Fonseca may linger in the black shadow and innuendo of smoke, oils, and mineral—the constellations of energy flexing itself over the surface textures. Pausing to look at his veracity, I imagine the West before it became an open window of a car, a steady cruise, a long drive into desert time and heated light—a space we rush through and neglect, because it is not as

Left top

KOTA, HARRY'S GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

Left bottom

FRED ADAMS AND STELLA EEL (BROTHER AND SISTER), HARRY'S GRANDFATHER AND GREAT AUNT

considerate of our comfort as other places. It is a place one should linger to know oneself in a simple and vulnerable relationship. It is a place to stand and look at our reflection in the forms left by the volcanoes, the wind, the rain. We are shaped by our attention. We are unconscious of our own erosion and regeneration. This dignified attention is the essence of rock art and present in the attention and energy of Fonseca.

In rock art we see the millennial epoch of native inhabitancy on the American continents through looking and standing on the land as someone in the past must have. Looking out over the horizon, we may never experience the piece in totality. We do not know enough of the cosmology, perhaps. Maybe the earth shifted slightly and the light hits it differently. The artists lived through the creation of the work, day by day, season by season. Looking perhaps makes the connection a pilgrimage to see the

ancestral mark, replayed in its specific site with light by a story, but our time is limited and few connect. Few know the profound aesthetic of the land since our knowledge is not often handed over in entirety. Our intensity is different and short-lived.

More often than not, our passion is misplaced and misguided. The rampage to cover the hills in search of gold, and later, the zeal for souls changed the reverence for land to mere reference to it as conquered or raped. The gaping eyes looked for signs of some glitter, or a place to settle and live without societal restrictions or law. The natural law of the Creator, the natural society of indigenous creativity, ceased or was hidden, because it was illegal to speak the Indian languages, practice indigenous religion, or gather to prepare ceremony. The Creation of the Indigenous People became a souvenir relic of a time thought to have ceased, until ceremony restored the connection and the dancers told the story once more, or a song was handed down without fear. Our story tells of all the people of the earth, and the animals who signify a unity that will aid us and enable our continuance.

Many people hid and watched the newcomers, all men, dig and sift and poison the

ground to take bits of yellow metal. Often the strangers shot people for fun, and later soldiers came and made carnage a rational, systematic genocide for the sake of progressing colonialism. This is one story: "I was very small and the soldiers came. I was so afraid and my mother told me to run away and hide. Do not turn back, no matter what I heard. I wandered in the forest and nearly starved, except I found a very old woman of our people who had left us to be alone. She was too old and worthless, she thought, until she saw me and knew she had to teach me how to live and remember everything. She told me to never forget this time. I would tell of it many times. Much later, many years, they released my people from the fort. They had a hard time without any of our things. They were afraid, because everyday they did not know if the soldier's order would be to kill them all. They killed other villages that way. We lived. I am here today because of that old woman and her stories. She knew all the places to find food and to hide. I told my children what she taught me through the land."

When I think of the gold and glory, I think of conformity. Ingots are made so uniform and measurable. The symbols are part of our stories—the cross, the holy colors that min-

gle in vision, the blood we cherish, and our lineage. Sun and gold can be equivalent and balanced. The Aztec gold shows how plentiful and prosperous the artisans were, and yes, there was blood spilled. The crosses and gold of Fonseca's series should be filmed, one after another; however we imagine the animation of his electrical energy, visually there is no ambivalence. We are a swirl of clouds shaping and misting over the centerpiece of dark cross-

es. Hands appearing and thumbprints, the reach of touch and caress. The love that becomes overwhelmed by misconstrued and extreme duty and ideology. The crosses and gold have become atmospheric portraits of energy of the many souls and lives departed and reappearing. While it is not overtly grief-stricken, the light in these works shimmers into our minds of what has passed and may come again.







COLOR PLATES

All images courtesy of the artist
Dimensions in inches

PLATE 1

THE MAIDU CREATION STORY, 1996
Mixed media on canvas
72 x 120

PLATE 2

WEST MESA #1, 1985
Acrylic on unstretched canvas
72 x 83

PLATE 3

NOCTURNE #11, 1990
Mixed media on unstretched canvas
72 x 58

PLATE 4

STONE POEM #8, 1989
Mixed media on unstretched canvas
72 x 90

PLATE 5

STONE POEM #11, 1989
Mixed media on unstretched canvas
84 x 72

PLATE 6

THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD AND SOULS IN
CALIFORNIA, 1991–92
Eight crosses from a series of 160
Mixed media on paper
15 x 11

PLATE 7

UNTITLED, 1990
Mixed media on unstretched canvas
72 x 59

PLATE 8

STONE POEM #35, 1989
Mixed media on unstretched canvas
72 x 60

PLATE 9

STONE POEM #39, 1989
Mixed media on unstretched canvas
72 x 72

PLATE 10

STONE POEM #1, 1989
Mixed media on unstretched canvas
82 x 72

PLATE 11

SAINT FRANCIS AND WILD RAVENS, 1996
Mixed media on shipping crate
72 x 46 x 4³/₄

CHRONOLOGY

Born January 5, 1946, Sacramento

Education

Sacramento City College
California State University, Sacramento

Selected Solo Exhibitions

1996
Cline LewAllen Contemporary, Santa Fe, NM

1994-95
"New Work," Fonseca Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

1993
"Stone Poems," East Hawaii Cultural Center Gallery,
Hilo, HI

1992
"The Discovery of Gold and Souls in California,"
Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA

1992
"A Gift from California—the Maidu Creation Story,"
Meridian Gallery, San Francisco, CA

1989-91
"Stone Poems," American Indian Community House
Gallery, New York, NY; Southwest Museum, Los
Angeles, CA; Stremmel Gallery, Reno, NV

1990
"Coyote Steps Out," Santa Barbara Museum of
Natural History, Santa Barbara, CA

1990
"New Paintings, Ancient Sources," Meridian Gallery,
San Francisco, CA

1989
"Steingedichte und Coyote," Galerie Calumet,
Heidelberg, Germany

1986-89
"Coyote: A Myth in the Making," National Museum
of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution,

Washington, DC; Field Museum of Natural History,
Chicago, IL; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE;
Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Colorado Springs,
CO; Fresno Metropolitan Museum, Fresno, CA; The
Oakland Museum, Oakland, CA; Millicent Rogers
Museum, Taos, NM; Natural History Museum of Los
Angeles County, Los Angeles, CA

1988

American Indian Contemporary Arts, San Francisco,
CA

1987

"Coyote's Wild and Woolly West," Elaine Horwitch
Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

1986

"Coyote Comes to Market Street," American Indian
Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, CA

1984

"Swan Lake," October Art, New York; Elaine
Horwitch Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

1984

American West, Chicago, IL

1983

"In Search of Coyote: The Paintings and Works on
Paper of Harry Fonseca," Wheelwright Museum,
Santa Fe, NM

1982-83

Elaine Horwitch Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

1980-81

Los Llanos Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

1978

"The Maidu Creation Story," C.N. Gorman Museum,
University of California, Davis, CA

1977

"So That's the Beginning," The Quail Plume Studio,
Sacramento, CA

1976

"Paintings by Harry Fonseca," Museum of the Plains
Indian, Browning, MT

1975

Pacific Western Traders, Folsom, CA